

Mr Clive Betts MP
Chair of the Levelling up, Housing and Communities Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

27 April 2023

Dear Mr Betts

Re: Collection of data on numbers turned away outside polling station due to lack of voter ID

Thank you for your letter of 26 April in relation to the data the Commission will be collecting following the local elections on 4 May. I fully understand the Committee's concern that an accurate assessment will be able to be made of the impact on voters of this first deployment of the photographic ID requirement.

The Elections Act and the Voter Identification Regulations 2022 require polling station staff to collect data on the people that cannot be issued with a ballot paper because they were unable to provide an accepted form of ID. This includes data on people who are turned away and later return to the polling station with accepted ID. Legally, this information can only be recorded by a poll clerk or presiding officer when a voter requests a ballot paper at the issuing desk, and cannot be gathered by a greeter at the entrance.

However, it is clear that the presence of a greeter at a polling station – while helpful in supporting the smooth administration of polling station voting – is likely to affect the data recorded at the desk. For this reason, the legislation also requires the Electoral Registration Officer for each local authority to separate data for polling stations with and without greeters when submitting data after the polls.

The Elections Act 2022 and resulting statutory instrument specify what data should be collected, and require Electoral Registration Officers to provide this data to the Government and the Commission. The Commission will be collecting this data – for those stations with and without greeters – and will share it with the Government as we receive it.

We are not asking Electoral Registration Officers to also collect data via greeters, in addition to their legal requirements. This is because the process of collecting the data, for example using tally charts, risks providing inaccurate data in an inconsistent way. Practically, it also does not allow for the accurate recording of voters who might return to polling stations with the correct ID having been previously turned away. This can only be accurately recorded at the desk where the elector numbers of individual voters are held.

While we know that some potential voters will be turned away by greeters, others will be deterred earlier in their journey or earlier on polling day, and despite the very best efforts would remain beyond the reach of any practical data collection exercise. It has therefore never been the case that an accurate, specific number of people impacted could be defined.

However, the Commission is experienced at using wider survey work to supplement quantitative data to assess the overall impact of changes to elections. In our reporting on the elections, the Commission will make an assessment of the wider impact of the ID requirements using other types of research; importantly this will include public opinion surveying across England, asking about people's experiences of voting or trying to vote on 4 May. We will also, as we do each year, survey electoral administrators, campaigners and electoral observers. We will publish our initial findings in June before our more detailed survey results are published in our post-poll report in September.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. J. P.', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

John Pullinger
Chair